

## GENERAL ASPECTS OF SIGNS IN JOHN

In general they are the kind of miracles expected with the dawn of the Messianic age. the feeding of the multitude and the miracle at Cana fit into this pattern inasmuch as they correspond to the expectation that the Messianic age will put an end to hunger and thirst.

John says nothing about exorcisims of demons by Jesus. A survey of the miraculous acts of of Jesus which are called signs in this Gospel suggest that John is less interested in typical Messianic miracles on the part of Jesus than in tthose which by their greatness raise the question as to the nature of the One who works in them. (But then, this is thepurpose of tthe signs -- to raise questions about the One doing them, no so much the works themselves.

John is presented to the readers as a collection of signs which is designed to give them assurance that Jesus is the Messiah.

In John, sign is a key word in theological interpretation.

In John, SIGN is not describing the works of Jesus as miralces but as signs which make a specific insight possible by bringing a certain matter to light. This consists in the fact that Jesus brings a new view of God. It's distinctiveness is that God as Father may be known only in Jesus as Son.

(No passage in John claims the sign of Jesus for God so plainly as 12:37b ff., for here, on the basis of Isa. 53:1, God's own relation to the phenomenon of Jesus is linked to the signs. John 12:37b ff. can only mean that on the basis of His signs Jesus is depicted as the One inwhom the fate of all men is decidied according to the will of God, not at some point in the future but here and now, i. e., when there is a confrontation with Him.)

John refers to the signs of Jesus in such a way as to leave the impression that they are the decisive thing in establishing Jesus as the Messiah.

The significance of the signs of Jesus goes beyond the immediate hour and those who share in it as spectators. By having Jesus link words of revelation concerning His personn with a series of signs (6:32ff; 9:39; 11:25; cf. 5:17), John brings out the fact that the signs have a constant power to

establish faith because Jesus always remains the One He is. (That is, if Jesus changed, then the signs of 2,000 years ago would be out of date. But since He is the same, there is no need for new or additional signs. If these signs were not enough, John could have told of many more, for faith is not forced by the many signs given -- don't need to pile up signs). Since faith also cannot be forced by the signs, this always develops a critical function alongside its power to establish faith.

III. The signs do not compel us to believe, they challenge us to believe.

The christological knowledge which the works of Jesus mediate as signs is permanent, so that these can become an imperishable part of the divine message.

In spite of all arguments to the contrary, this is also the point when for John, too, the post-Easter community needs no new signs. It has the word of the witnesses. To this degree it is superior to the apostles in the way it comes to faith and in its faith, for they could become believers only through divine demonstrations.

#### SIGNS AND GLORY

In John 2:11 the manifestation of the glory of Jesus is linked with His first sign, the miracle at Cana. His glory is said to be manifested in the same way at the sign of the raising of Lazarus. The signs of Jesus and the glory of God are interrelated in 12:37ff. with emphasis on the fact that it is the privilege of believers alone to grasp the point at issue. With the signs faith arises if the glory which shines therein is "seen." (1:14).

The relation between sign and glory in John may be defined as follows. In His signs Jesus in some sense makes Himself transparent and causes His true being, His sonship, to be manifested in its glory.

NOTE: At Cana the headwaiter saw only the wine, the servants saw more, but only the miracle -- but the disciples saw His glory. 3 groups: The headwaiter saw the wine, the servants saw the miracle, the disciples saw His glory.

The headwaiter: saw the wonderful result of Jesus' work, declared it to be the best, but had no idea it was owed to Jesus. Today people applaud humanitarian efforts, women's respect, charity, hospitals, without ever once thanking the Christ who made it possible.

Headwaiter: people who see the good things, admire them, applaud them, but never once consider the source from which it came -- every good and perfect gift comes from above.

The servants: see the miracle, excited, awed, but do not come to faith...interest goes no further than the miracle. They see the sign but not as a sign...sign meant to point beyond the miracle to Jesus, but some people never see beyond the miracle.

#### BARRETT

Rightly to understand them (the signs, miracles) is to apprehend Christ by faith (10:38; 14:11). The miracles once grasped in their true meaning lead at once to the Christology, since they are a manifestation of the glory of Christ (2:11).

The sign is a symbolical anticipation or showing forth of a greater reality of which the sign is nevertheless a part. A sign calls the attention of the people of God to the fulfilment of his purposes, and a sign draws the attention of the Gentiles to the glory of God. It is no mere illusion.

The miracles are set in a context of human need which ranges from the comparative triviality of a deficiency of wine at a wedding feast to the death of a beloved friend and brother.

## GOSPEL OF JOHN -- MERRILL C. TENNEY

I John 20:30,31 there is a clear declaration of the author's intention in writing. Following as it does the climatic confession of Thomas, this assertion closes the main narrative and makes the final appeal to the reader.

WORDS FOR MIRACLES: Teras appears in Acts 2:19 and elsewhere, is translated wonder and emphasizes the character of the miracle as a portent or prodigy, something outside the usual course of events. Dunamis is the root of the English word, dynamite, and stresses the power revealed in the performance of the miracle, and implies the spiritual energy which produced it.

Paradoxon, English, paradox, pictures the contradictory nature of the miracle, its incongruity with the order of the natural world, and its strangeness to the unusual current of thought.

Semeion, however, when applied to a miracle, usually implies that the deed is an indication of some power or meaning behind it to which it is secondary in importance.

It is the only word used in John for miracle. John presented the miracles not merely as supernatural deeds nor manifestations of supernatural power, nor even as exceptions to the usual current events, but definitely as material witnesses to underlying spiritual truth. The teaching attached to each miracle is designed to bring out its spiritual significance, and, conversely, the miracle is the concrete demonstration of the power discussed in the teaching.

John was careful to tell us they were performed "in the presence of his disciples." The signs were not products of the writer's personal imagination. Certain deeds performed by Jesus of Nazareth were so startling that they deserved special notice and called for explanation.

Each of these seven signs revealed some specific characteristic of Jesus' power and person.

These seven signs, then, are preeminately signs because they point to those aspects of Jesus' ministry in which He demonstrated His transcendent control over the factors of life with which man is unable to cope. Daily existence is a

struggle against their limitations. Christ's superiority over them as revealed by these events called signs was proof of His deity and a clue to understanding what John wanted to say about Him.

Belief never means a mere assent to a proposition. John sought to lead his readers to a settled faith on the basis of actual signs which were historic episodes, and which connoted the spiritual reality behind them.

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THE SEVEN SIGNS OF JOHN - "We looked on His glory"

Introductory material

The word "sign" occurs seventeen times in John and bears a weighty meaning. It is used of the mighty works of Jesus, which John never calls miracles (Gk. dynameis) or wonders (Gk. terata). By the use of the word "signs" John indicates that the miracles of the Lord are enacted parables, whose deep significance cannot be perceived except by the eyes of faith.

Yet the miracles recounted in John are all of them very great supernatural acts of power. But their meaning is known only to those who have faith in Christ, and in several cases a miracle is used as the peg or "text" on which to hang a long discourse of the Lord's.

Seven "signs" are recounted in John:

1. The Changing of the Water into Wine (2:1-11).
2. The Healing of the Nobleman's Son (4:46-54).
3. The Healing of the Impotent Man (5:2-9).
4. The Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:4-13).
5. The Walking on the Water (6:16-21).
6. The Healing of the Man Born Blind (9:1-7).
7. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44).

John is aware that Jesus worked many other signs beside these seven (20:30; 21:25). [Why then did he choose these particular seven? In 20:30f, "John says that he has made his selection of signs in order that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" -- Barrett, p. 64. He chose these specific signs, not because they were the most amazing or the most dramatic -- though they were both amazing and dramatic --, but because these seven would best reveal the identity and manifest the glory of Christ.]

Apart from faith in Christ the signs have no meaning; there were many who saw the signs with their outward eyes and yet did not believe (12:37). The hidden glory of the Lord shines through them to those disciples who believe on Him (2:11).

And John speaks a personal word to us on the question of the miracles of Jesus: BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED (20:29).

According to this review Sign ( ) is in fact "always a sign in external reality which points to something else." But history has also proved to be its sphere. Itself truly historical, in a given historical situation it is usually directed to eyewitnesses with a view to unleashing historical effects by way of their insight and will. To that degree it finally aims at much more than the mere confirmation which must be its primary goal; it claims or achieves direct influence on personal decisions which will always have historical consequences.

#### GOD'S SIGNS AND WONDERS

When the OT speaks of God's signs and wonders its style takes on what is almost a hymnal character. . . . The author of these events is God and it may be that the expression which is designed to sum up their character tries to do so in two ways: The extraordinary events at issue here point back to God and they are also of such a kind as to proclaim imminent upheaval, cf. I Kings 13:3,5; 2 Ch 32:24. essential is that the events themselves are dumb and that Israel for its part -- this must not be forgotten -- is the silent object of what occurs. In the phrase "signs and wonders," then, all the emphasis lies from the very first on the event as such in its quality as a work of God.

#### SIGN IN JOHN

The essential reference is to visual perception and the assurance this gives.

In Jn it offers the chance to know something specific (Jn 10:32ff).

JOHN 4:48: Is this an attack on a missionary strategy which tries to induce faith by appealing to "signs and wonders", and is it not also correcting a naive faith in miracles as seen in the Synoptic tradition. Yet the question must be put with greater precision than this. the word is possibly connected with the circle of ideas around the Passover as the feast of remembrance for the exodus and liberation. Jesus opposes in His own people an attitude like that of the wilderness generation in which readiness to believe is made dependent on signs and wonders, signs and wonders being expected from Jesus as from Moses, since Jesus is the promised new prophet like unto Moses.

Another possibility is that the attack is on an understanding of Christianity in which it is typologically identified with the Israel of Moses' time and signs and wonders are thus regarded as proper to it. It could be that John has in view enthusiastic circles who in their

NOTES ON SIGN FROM KITTEL, VII, 200ff.

General Greek Usage.

In Homer the word denotes optical impressions which suggest or make possible certain insights.

The word always has to do with an object or circumstance which makes possible or is designed to make possible a specific perception or insight. . . . it refers to what strikes the eye.

GREEK OLD TESTAMENT

In Ex. 9:4,6, where a certain part of the population of Jerusalem is to be marked on the forehead with a Tau, the last letter of the Heb. alphabet originally written in the form of a cross.

The Hebrew use of SIGN in the Old Testament.

In Gen. 9:12, the rainbow is a sign of the covenant. God -- like men -- will look on this and be reminded of the covenant.

In Ex. 4:8ff the signs ( ) which Moses is meant to perform are meant to validate him in order that the Israelites may listen to what he has to say to them on God's commission, and in the last resort, therefore, may hear him. Ex 4:30ff expressly says that the signs ( ) are done in the eyes of all the people and achieve their purpose of kindling confidence in Moses.

These signs work for clarification and confirmation -- so that a certainty is established which was not present before.

AT LEAST TWICE the aim of is faith. In the OT faith is closely related not only to perception but to the knowledge of God. Only the man who knows God can believe in Him (Note: For this reason faith in the OT comes only on the basis of God's self-revelation. No man knows God of himself; God must testify to Himself as the One he is if there is to be faith in Him.). This is finely illustrated in Nu 14:11: God is surprised that in spite of all His signs among them His people does not believe in Him, i. e., trust Him. It has obviously seen in vain and been led to the perception of God in vain.



Source: Alan Richardson, The Gospel According to Saint John,  
Torch Bible Paperbacks, pp. 62, 63.

\*These signs do not COMPEL men to believe -- they  
CHALLENGE men to believe.

From The Gospel According to John, by C. K. Barrett, pp.  
62f.

The miracles in John: They are a function of its  
Christology. Rightly to understand them is to apprehend  
Christ by faith (10:38; 14:11). The miracles once grasped  
in their true meaning lead at once to the Christology, since  
they are a manifestation of the glory of Christ (2:11).

The miracles of Jesus are described as his works  
(erga).

The miracles are also described as signs (semeion).  
This is one of the most characteristic and important words  
of the gospel. In classical Greek it means a  
distinguishing mark, a token, or a signal.....

A sign is a part of the proclamation of the glory of  
God to the gentiles (Isa. 66:19). . . .(it is) no mere  
illustration, but a symbolical anticipation or showing forth  
of a greater reality of which the "sign" is nevertheless  
itself a part. A sign calls the attention of the people of  
God to the fulfilment of his purposes, and, finally, a sign  
draws the attentions of the Gentiles to the glory of God.

John's use of the word is in marked contrast to the  
synoptists, who use it of eschatological events. They  
(John's use) were signs in the Old testament sense, special  
demonstrations of the character and power of God, and  
partial but effective realizations of his salvation (an  
earnest).

For the synoptists, signs were used for those  
eschatological events which mark the approach of the end.  
For John the miracles themselves are eschatological events;  
but for them the eschatological significance of the ministry  
of Jesus is a hidden thing, which will be understood only in  
the eschatological future....But to John: To those who do  
believe, the miracles are signs which feed their faith; to  
those who do not, signs may be multiplied indefinitely  
without producing faith (12:37).

The miracles are set in a context of human need which  
ranges from the comparative triviality of a deficiency of  
wine at a wedding feast to the death of a beloved friend and  
brother --[The first and last sign].

typological thinking are inclined to see in Christianity only the new Israel so that they run the danger of forgetting that they are in principle independent of continual miraculous experiences in virtue of the resurrection of their Lord from the dead. At any rate, Jn 4:48 gives an insight into the nature of Chr faith and Chr community such as is formulated in 20:29b with its independence of any kind of demonstration.

General Aspects of the Distinctive Johannine Usage.

The distinctiveness of the Johannine use of "sign" is that here, both in the Gospel and the Rev., the word has taken over the role which dynamis plays elsewhere in the NT and especially in the Synoptics, namely, as the exclusive term for certain miraculous events.